



**“IN CRITICAL CONVERSATION WITH NANAS MARTIN AND MALCOLM:
MAPPING OUR WAY FORWARD IN TREACHEROUS TIMES”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 1. CERTAINLY, NO ONE CAN HONESTLY doubt, accurately deny or innocently dismiss the fact that we are living in treacherous and trying times. When we speak of treacherous times, we are talking of risky and unreliable times, times that are unstable, unpredictable and unworthy of trust even at the most essential levels of social expectations. And when we talk of trying times, we are speaking of times that will test to the limit our moral courage and commitment, our will to struggle for the good even after calculating the costs, and our radical refusal to be defeated. Surely, when we speak of treacherous and trying times, we are talking of a sinister situation in which gangsters en masse have seized the government with the approval of the gung-ho and “go-get-‘em” crowd from every sector of White society—rich and poor, Catholic, Protestant, Jew and gentile, gay, straight and trans, urban, suburban and rural, ruling class and working class. Indeed, it is Black people who, more than any other group, voted in resistance to an emerging fascism.

This gangsta group has come into position and power vowing mobster vendettas, publicly calling for the heads of the Alfredo Garcias they claim have betrayed them and those who do not bow down before the idols and insanities they offer as saving gods and social goods. They have callously cut the neck and dismissed the need of DEI programs, pretending a concern for a merit they themselves do not have, demonstrating daily decisions and choices of unbelievable incompetence and inestimable wreckage and ruin for all but the rich. And they promise to preach and practice more of this moral and social mayhem and threaten to crush all opposition.

Thus, as January, the month of the birth of Nana Dr. Martin Luther King, moves and merges into February, the month of the martyrdom of Nana Haji Malcolm, we seek the wisdom of the ancestors and turn to them for insights and advice. And we ask them, “Where do we go from here?”, as Dr. King, Haji Malcolm, other leaders and we ask ourselves in such difficult, dangerous and demanding times. Dr. King poses an expanded question, “Where do we go from here; community or chaos?” And it is this focus on community and posing it as a key shield against chaos that he and Haji Malcolm repeatedly stressed in their moral message, organizing work and our political struggles. Now, the central question of where we go from here involves three interrelated questions: who are we; what are we to do; and how are we to do it. It is a question of determining our identity, purpose and direction. And the question of identity precedes and makes possible our determining our purpose and direction in rightful and fruitful ways.

So, the question again is how do we map out and make a way forward in our struggle for liberation, racial and social justice and other shared human goods in this country and the world in these treacherous and trying times. If we are to logically begin at the beginning, our mapping our way forward must start and continue with a clear understanding of who we are. For the question of where we go from here involves knowing who we are before we can determine what we are to do and how are we to do it. This is especially important in an era in which we have learned to claim and cling to multiple identities which don’t simply define or describe us but also divide us if we don’t conscientiously begin with and return to the common and unifying

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ground of our shared community identity as a people, a Black people, an African people. It is this community consciousness and commitment which Dr. King and Haji Malcolm wants us to embrace, build on and be actively conscious of as we audaciously assert ourselves in society and the world.

Both Dr. King and Haji Malcolm want us to understand ourselves in rightful and expansive ways, not in the narrow and negative ways society has taught and imposed on us. They rightfully defined us as a key moral and social vanguard in this country and the world. Thus, Dr. King urges us to struggle in ways that compel history to witness and historians to record that “there lived a great people, a Black people, who through their struggle injected a new meaning and dignity in the veins of civilization”. Indeed, he says, “This is our challenge and overwhelming responsibility.” Likewise, Haji Malcolm taught us to see ourselves as a key people in a key country, as a part of the rising tide of human history. He stated concerning our freedom struggle that “our struggle is part of a larger world struggle of oppressed peoples against all forms of oppression.” And “What we do here in regaining our self-respect, our manhood (and womanhood), our dignity and freedom helps all people everywhere who also are fighting against oppression”.

Both Haji Malcolm and Dr. King were concerned about the psychological damage done by this system to destroy and disguise our strength, achievements and essential historical role in radically reimagining and reconstructing this country in freedom-focused and justice-practicing ways. Both saw a cultural and political dimension to our struggle for freedom. As we say in Kawaida, our struggle was and remains always a struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves and build with others so inclined and invested a new

world of shared and inclusive good. Dr. King says that we must overcome the “cultural homicide” that our oppressors have imposed on us. That is to say a cultural killing and psychological damaging of Black people which is “as old as the earliest history books and as contemporary as the morning paper”. Therefore, he urges us to realize and act upon the fact that one of the first and most indispensable acts of freedom is that “we must stand up amongst the system which still oppresses us and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values”. These values, as Kawaida teaches, building on the wisdom of our ancestors, are the dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving values rooted in the ancient and ongoing history and culture of our people. And central to these values and this valuing is the valuing of ourselves and the good we have done and do in the world.

Haji Malcolm clearly criticizes this society as racistly destructive to Black people’s understanding and assertion of themselves in the world. He states that “I have no mercy or compassion in me for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight.” He speaks of the oppressor’s deculturalization and dehumanization of African peoples through violence and problematizing our lives, minds, spirit and bodies. And he tells us that because of this, too often many of us are greatly unjust to ourselves and thus to each other. Therefore, he says “We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are to ever liberate ourselves from the bonds of White supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people”.

He then tells us that we must reach inside ourselves and struggle to repair ourselves and develop the awesome potential within each and all of us. For he says, “a race of people is like an individual man (woman);

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until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its own history, expresses its own culture, affirms its own selfhood, it can never fulfill itself”. Thus, he declares that “We, Afro-Americans -- enslaved, oppressed, and denied by a society that proclaims itself the citadel of democracy, are determined to rediscover our history, promote the talents that are suppressed by our racist enslavers, renew the culture that was crushed by a slave government and thereby – to again become a free people”. And this remains our central task and awesome responsibility.

| HERE HAJI MALCOLM, LIKE DR. KING, reaffirms his belief in the potential and power of our people and urges us to recognize the divinity and dignity within us and to wage righteous and relentless liberating struggle. For only by this righteous and relentless struggle can we end what Haji Malcolm called an American nightmare and reconceive and achieve what Dr. King called our longed-for American dream, a radically transformed free and just society of inclusive good.▲

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